



Hunting Season / Quota Change Supporting Information

Species: Black Bear

Region: 7

Hunting District: 700

Year: Fall 2021

1. *Describe the proposed season / quota changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e. prior history of permits, season types, etc.).*

The proposal is to increase the Region 7 (BMU 700) fall black bear harvest quota from 8 to 12.

The first Region 7 black bear season was implemented in 2006 with a spring quota of 2 and a fall quota of 2. From 2010-2013, the fall quota was 4 and since the 2013 season the fall quota has been 8 (Table 1). The spring quota was 2 from 2006-2017, and since the 2018 season has been 4 (Table 2).

2. *Why is the proposed change necessary?*

All indicators (harvest, observation frequency and location, cub observation, property damage frequency and location, and livestock depredation) suggest that Region 7 black bear populations continue to grow and expand. The proposed change is needed due to this expanding population; including to reduce bear conflicts, maintain social tolerance of black bears across a mostly privately-owned landscape, maintain public safety and increase hunting opportunities.

Since the implementation of a black bear season in 2006, there has been a continual increase in the frequency and spatial extent of black bear observations, property damage reports, and landowner complaints. What were once relatively rare occurrences on or surrounding the Ashland Ranger District of the Custer National Forest regular observations now extend north to Miles City, east to Hammond, northeast to Ekalaka and west to the Bighorn River.

Region 7 game wardens and biologists have received and responded to more black bear complaints each year. They have also received more frequent reports of bear sightings from landowners and hunters, further indicating that the black bear population in Region 7 is healthy and expanding.

Since increasing the fall harvest quota to 8, it has been met 4 of 7 years, with two years going over the quota (Table 1). Quotas, when met, have been met by mid to late October. Hunters and landowners continued to observe bears

beyond these October closures. As of November 20, 2020, 5 black bears have been harvested in Region 7 of the fall 2020 season, with the last harvested bear being reported on October 10, 2020.

- 3. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years population survey, harvest or other pertinent information).*

No formal population surveys have been completed in Region 7. Other indices (referenced above) suggest that regional black bear populations remain healthy and continue to grow and expand.

The Region 7 management objectives are to optimize harvest opportunity for sportsmen and maintain social tolerance of black bears by proactively addressing private property damage and livestock depredation through hunter harvest. Increasing the fall harvest quota addresses both of these objectives.

Since initiating a black bear season in Region 7, eighty-six bears have been harvested; sixty-six (77%) during fall seasons (Table 1) and twenty (23%) during spring seasons (Table 2). Of those harvested in the fall, forty-eight (73%) were male and eighteen (27%) female. Sixteen (85%) spring harvests were males.

Sixty-five harvested bears between 2007 and 2019 were aged using cementum annuli analysis (Table 3). Forty-two (65%) were <3 years old, fourteen (22%) were aged between 3-5 years, and 9 (13%) were >5 years old. Ages from 2020 harvests will not be available until summer 2021. With harvest being primarily young, 4 years old or less, male bears (84%) and anecdotal evidence that the population is expanding, an increase in harvest will not cause a detrimental effect on the population and will assist wildlife managers in proactively addressing bear/human conflicts.

- 4. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors that have relevance to this change (i.e. habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, temperature / precipitation information).*

There have been no major weather or habitat factors (major wildfire events), in recent years, that have influenced this proposed quota change.

- 5. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments.*

Contact has been made with sportsmen, area landowners, block management cooperators, USFS personnel, MFWP area wardens, outfitters and wildlife related business owners. The consensus of these contacts expressed agreement with and support for increasing the fall black bear quota in Region 7. Please see Attachment 1 for specific comments.

6. *Figures and Tables.*

Table 1. Region 7 fall black bear harvest, 2006-20. The 2020 season was still underway upon the writing of this justification.

Year	Quota	Harvest	Male	Female	Season Close
2006	2	0	0	0	none
2007	2	0	0	0	none
2008	2	2	2	0	2-Oct
2009	2	1	1	0	none
2010	4	4	3	1	19-Oct
2011	4	4	2	2	27-Nov
2012	4	4	2	2	13-Oct
2013	8	3	3	0	none
2014	8	4	4	0	none
2015	8	8	4	4	30-Oct
2016	8	5	3	2	none
2017	8	9	6	3	24-Oct
2018	8	8	6	2	29-Oct
2019	8	9	8	1	17-Oct
2020	8	5	4	1	
Totals	84	66	48	18	

Table 2. Region 7 spring black bear harvest, 2006-20.

Year	Quota	Harvest	Male	Female	Season Close
2006	2	0	0	0	none
2007	2	1	1	0	none
2008	2	0	0	0	none
2009	2	1	1	0	none
2010	2	1	1	0	none
2011	2	1	1	0	none
2012	2	1	1	0	none
2013	2	2	2	0	16-May
2014	2	2	1	1	21-Apr
2015	2	1	1	0	none
2016	2	2	1	1	10-May
2017	2	2	2	0	25-May
2018	4	1	1	0	none
2019	4	1	1	0	none
2020	4	4	2	2	11-May
Totals	36	20	16	4	

Table 3. Region 7 harvested black bear ages, 2006-19. Note: Ages from 2020 harvests will be added during July 2021.

Year	Number Aged	1-2 years	3-5 years	≥6 years
2006	0	0	0	0
2007	1	0	1	0
2008	1	1	0	0
2009	2	2	0	0
2010	4	2	2	0
2011	4	2	1	1
2012	4	3	1	0
2013	4	2	1	1
2014	6	3	2	1
2015	9	8	0	1
2016	6	4	1	1
2017	8	2	4	2
2018	9	7	0	2
2019	7	6	1	0
Totals	65	42	14	9

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Date: November 18, 2020

Approved: Brad Schmitz 11/19/20
Regional Supervisor/Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____
Name / Date

Reason for modification: _____

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ATTACHMENT 1

- In general, sportsman (local and non local) inquires (phone calls and field visits) about black bear hunting in southeastern Montana are on the rise; especially sportsmen looking to combine bear hunts with spring turkey or fall mule deer or elk hunts. Sportsmen have shown support for increased harvest opportunities.
- The majority of southeast Montana landowners utilize lands to produce cattle and sheep. Their tolerance for large predators such as black bears and mountain lions remains extremely low. Quick response by MFWP to depredation issues and a willingness to maintain a liberal and proactive management philosophy with regards to regulated harvest is critical to maintaining any tolerance. Landowner support for increasing the bear quota remains overwhelming; especially following this past summer where a well documented sheep depredation occurred, multiple sows with cubs were observed, bears were observed where they haven't been, and stock tank damage again increased.
- From the Forsyth Game Warden "Many of the archery hunters I encountered on the Custer National Forest observed bears and a few with cubs this fall. Almost every landowner and about half of the hunters I encountered were in favor of increasing the quota, the rest of the hunters were indifferent, I have not encountered anyone yet who has felt the current quota is too broad."
- From the Forsyth Area Biologist. "In Hunting District 702, more black bear activity is continuing to be observed. Around stock tanks it is now common to see evidence of black bears scratching and biting at the enclosure posts. Also, the sharing images captured from game cameras by hunters and landowners, anecdotally, supports the expanded distribution of black bears through Hunting District 702.